



Cowpens' Community Rallies Around Brownfields Site

Cowpens, South Carolina

The Town of Cowpens, South Carolina, is proving true the adage that small towns come together when there is a crisis. When a baby clothes manufacturing plant closed in 1990, this town of 2,000 was faced with the loss of more than 400 jobs, as well as an abandoned building containing unknown amounts of contamination. However, Cowpens has made great strides toward revitalizing the site, as have interested parties by donating more than \$225,000 worth of time and services to prepare the property for cleanup and redevelopment.

The 228,000-square-foot clothing plant was once the largest employer in Cowpens. The clothing manufacturer purchased the site in 1981, secured by an agreement between the county and the manufacturer's parent company to guarantee \$10 million in industrial revenue bonds. When the parent firm sold the clothing company to a group of investors who shut down the Cowpens plant in 1990, the clothing company defaulted on the industrial revenue bonds, leaving the county holding title to the abandoned property.

Inside the dormant facility, town officials discovered 85 drums of industrial chemicals, with no responsible party to pay for cleanup. Operations at the plant had also contaminated the site's groundwater with tetrachloroethene, a substance similar to dry cleaning fluid-and to add to the problem, the former plant is located between the town's elementary and middle schools. Potential liability fears associated with the property's contamination prevented developers from buying and making any attempt to clean up and redevelop the site.

To help the town address these problems, EPA awarded Cowpens a \$200,000 EPA Brownfields Assessment Pilot Grant in May 1997; the town was one of the first small communities in the country to win such an award. This funding has allowed Cowpens to leverage time and services aimed at the revitalization of the abandoned plant.

A national environmental cleanup company agreed to test the contents of the 85 drums and remove them from the site. Estimated to cost \$50,000, the drum removal was performed free of charge in December 1997. This was just the start of many contributions from the community. A local environmental company performed an asbestos and lead paint survey on the facility and estimated the costs associated with cleanup. This was approximately \$25,000 worth of free service. A local roofing company conducted an evaluation of the roof, estimated to cost \$5,000,

Prior to its closing in 1990, a 228,000-square-foot, baby clothes manufacturing plant was the largest employer in the Town of Cowpens. When the plant's parent firm sold the clothing company to a group of investors who shut down the facility, the company defaulted on industrial revenue bonds and left the county holding title to the abandoned property. Inside the dormant facility, town officials discovered 85 drums of industrial chemicals, with no responsible party to pay for cleanup.

JUST THE FACTS:

- A national environmental cleanup company agreed to test the contents of 85 drums and remove them from the abandoned site. Estimated at \$50,000, this removal was performed free of charge-the first of many such local donations to help restore the property.
- Other leveraged services included an asbestos and lead paint survey, sampling and testing of the nearby creek, an evaluation of the roof, a video survey of the facility's sewer line, locksmith services, and environmental award money from the Lions Club.
- EPA's Brownfields Pilot also leveraged funding from the University of South Carolina at Columbia, which provided \$55,000 for technical services related to the design and development of a proposed Industrial Ecology Park on the 70-acre site.
- In addition, EPA Region 4 committed \$2,300 toward landscape design for the future redevelopment and \$6,000 toward emergency response ground studies and an electromagnetic survey of the property.

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The Pilot also leveraged funding from the University of South Carolina at Columbia, which provided \$55,000 for technical services related to the design and development of a proposed Industrial Ecology Park on the 70-acre site. The town provided \$27,571 in support of this plan, in addition to the \$1,500 the town provided to initialize the Cowpens Development Corporation Fund. The university also provided a Baseline Economics Study worth \$5,000, and Clemson University conducted a Retail Business Survey worth \$5,000; both free of charge.

In addition, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers expended approximately \$40,000 to conduct a groundwater sampling investigation on the site and in the surrounding community where contaminated groundwater was believed to have migrated. EPA Region 4 also committed \$2,300 toward a landscape design for the future redevelopment and \$6,000 toward emergency response ground studies and electromagnetic surveying.

All of these contributions were realized due to the dedication of the town leaders and the project leader. By seeking out sponsors interested in providing services free of charge, the town was able to direct more of the EPA brownfields grant money towards the complex soil and groundwater investigations that were necessary at the site. Leveraging cost estimates and future development plans was critical to the formation of the Cowpens Development Corporation and their taking title to the property. Currently, the Centers for Disease Control is working with the South Carolina Department of Environment & Health Control to resolve issues related to the contaminated groundwater at the site.

The town is hoping that its successful approach to this former manufacturing site can serve as a model for brownfields redevelopment in small communities across the country.

CONTACTS:

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Visit the EPA Brownfields web site at:

<http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/>